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Spinoza on God

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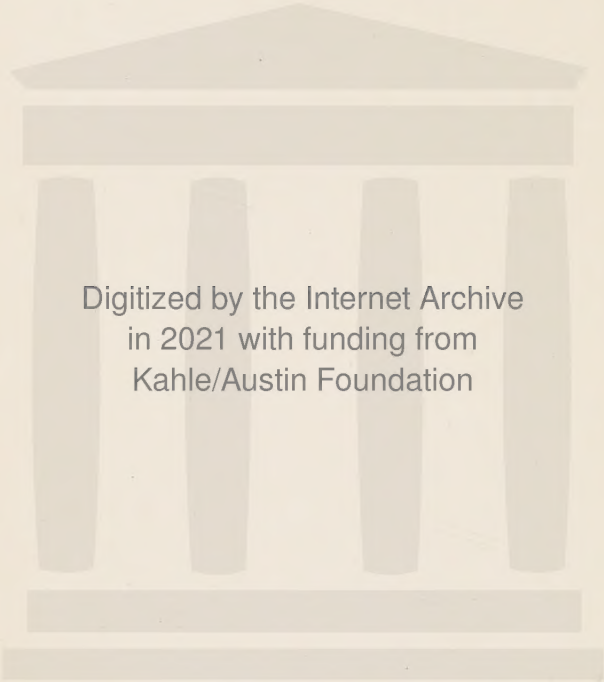
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# SPINOZA ON GOD

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# SPINOZA ON GOD

BY JOSEPH RATNER

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*To those who, when I was a stranger, took me in,*
*And when I was friendless became my friends,*
*This book is gratefully dedicated.*

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## *Preface*

Spinoza has long since ceased to be neglected by philosophers. The literature that has grown about his writings is already enormous and every year witnesses further additions. The members of this ever-larger army of interpreters and commentators do not, by any means, lie peacefully beside each other, each content with the ray of light he believes he has captured from the sun. Rather, they forever mill about like a contending horde, engaging in fierce guerilla warfare with one another. Fortunately, Spinoza's writings themselves can always be heard above the clamor of contention, even though at times a little indistinctly. Fortunately, Spinoza's writings have the strength to triumph over his friends, as he himself had, in his lifetime, the strength to triumph over his enemies.

The reading of works about Spinoza's philosophy is certainly valuable. It is not intended to imply the contrary. The *Ethics* seems, indeed in some respects, to stand in greater need of interpretation than any other philosophical treatise. The form of it is so difficult and the content so largely abstruse, it is a closed book to the untutored reader in a way in which, for example, Plato's

writings are not. And yet, on the other hand, paradoxical though it may sound, the *Ethics* needs interpretation much less than any other philosophy—needing it only a little more than does Euclid's *Elements*. To one totally ignorant of mathematics, Euclid will no doubt be impossible; likewise, to one totally ignorant of philosophy, Spinoza will be impossible. But it is far from wise to conclude from this that Spinoza can be understood only through interpretations.

There is a difference between philosophy and mathematics—although Spinoza did not want to allow it—a difference that accounts for the need of some interpretation which even the most geometrically demonstrated philosophy soon develops. The *Ethics* is no exception. But it is an exception in that, unlike most, if not all, other philosophies, its need for an interpretation is definitely secondary to its need for a careful textual analysis, in almost the literal meaning of the term textual. Given an analysis of the text, any one can read the *Ethics* adequately, and interpretation may, for the most part, be properly left to each one to make. This essay is directly a contribution to the textual analysis, and only indirectly to the philosophical interpretation of the *Ethics*. It is concerned with a restricted portion of the *Ethics* but it is a fundamental portion and has, in consequence, far-reaching implications. Circumstances have so far made

it impossible for me to carry this study any further, but I hope to be able to do so in the not too distant future.

An analysis that is primarily textual certainly has its limitations. But it has a compensating virtue in that it does not interpose between the reader and his subject some alien *tertium quid*. Instead, it enables the reader to get a direct acquaintance with Spinoza's philosophy which is vastly superior to any amount of "knowledge about"—which is all that interpretations can give. Indeed, interpretations can reliably give even "knowledge about" only after a demonstrably accurate reading of the text has been established. It is adding confusion to misrepresentation to determine the reading of the text by the interpretation we are desirous of making. All, or almost all, comprehensive treatises on Spinoza exhibit this methodological as well as philosophical fault. They propound an interpretation of Spinoza's general conceptions, and then, in the light of this interpretation, they read the several parts of his philosophy. Whence unjustified emphases, distortions of meaning and discoveries of contradictions which the interpreter, by a prevalent psychological fallacy, fastens onto Spinoza instead of onto himself. Furthermore, comprehensive treatises on Spinoza are, today, most unconscionably historical in their standpoint and their method. And historical interpretations always suffer from

exacerbated forms of the methodological and philosophical faults just noted. The study of medieval philosophy, especially, has unduly biased, if not actually led astray, contemporary students of Spinoza. Although there is no consensus of opinion, nor even preponderating agreement as to what, in the main, Spinoza's philosophy is, scholars of medieval philosophy can, nevertheless, with an amazing facility that knows no obstacles, find the precise and even literal sources from which that philosophy was presumably derived. Even the most medievally-minded of interpreters grants that Spinoza differs from his predecessors. But the best of them seem very insufficiently to realize—as is the case with all historians—that, as Carl Becker wittily puts it, differences are hardly inherited.

What Croce says about historical criticism in literature can, with equal justice and value, be said about historical criticism in philosophy. It is as true of philosophy as it is of art, that the relation between it "and its model is incommensurable." And, therefore—(substituting for Croce's terms appropriate to his subject-matter, terms appropriate to ours)—"the moment an idea is raised to the sphere of philosophy, an idea that has really been experienced is plucked from its historical soil, and made the motive of composition for a world of ideas, one of the infinite possible worlds, in which it is as useless to seek any longer the history of that idea as it is vain to seek a drop of water poured into the

ocean and transformed from what it was previously by ocean's vast embrace." Philosophy "should certainly be interpreted historically, but in the proper sense—disconnected, that is to say, from a history that is foreign to it and with which its only connection is that prevailing between a man and what he disregards, puts away from him and rejects, because it either injures him or is of no use, or—which comes to the same thing—because he has already made sufficient use of it." "The general traits which, among many differences, he shares with his contemporaries, predecessors and imitators form part of the history . . . (of his period) . . . but do not of themselves constitute the history that was properly speaking his own." If this essay has any influence in offsetting the present preoccupation with the historical sources—possible and impossible—of Spinoza's philosophy, its existence will be justified and its author content.

As has been the experience of so many, I chanced upon Spinoza when in deepest perplexity and he seemed to offer a clear way out. My perplexities were precipitated by Professor G. E. Moore's lectures on metaphysics which I had the good fortune of attending in 1924-1925. It was then that the argument of this essay, essentially as it is now, was first written. With the passage of time, Spinoza's metaphysics has lost for me most of the rapturous intensity of meaning it had at first; I no longer believe that it is the indispensable foundation of

personal life, nor even the last word in philosophy. Both time and further study have, however, continually strengthened my conviction that Spinoza is the beginning and much of the way. I am profoundly indebted to Professor Moore not only for this essay, but also for his unfailing sympathy and magnanimous help. I wish to express my gratitude to Trinity College, Cambridge, for their Research Scholarship in Moral Sciences which made possible my studying and meeting with Professor Moore. From Professor F. J. E. Woodbridge I learnt the valuable lesson that philosophy is also an inspiration—a lesson of especially great value to me in studying Spinoza. I am also greatly indebted to Professor Woodbridge for his unsparing critical and constructive aid in bringing this essay to its present form. Finally, there is my long-standing, many-formed and ever-increasing debt to Professor John Dewey, a debt contracted on behalf of this essay no less than on behalf of other undertakings —but it is a debt one despairs of ever being able to express and acknowledge in words.

JOSEPH RATNER.

January 15, 1930.
New York City.

Thanks are due the Editors of *The Philosophical Review* for permission to reprint such parts of this essay as have appeared in their journal.

# SPINOZA ON GOD

CHAPTER ONE

## *The Definitions of Substance, Attribute, Mode and God*

I

Spinoza's doctrine on God has engaged the attention of a long and distinguished line of commentators; and all possible varieties of interpretation, so it would seem, have at one time or another been advanced. Disagreement is not a new thing in philosophy, but it does assume a stranger aspect than usual when it is over a text like the *Ethics* which is demonstrated *ordine geometrico*. It would be folly to expect that all disagreement will ever be overcome even on so restricted a phase of Spinoza's system as his doctrine on God. But after allowances are made for the possible legitimate divergences of reading and interpretation, it does seem that the geometrical order of demonstration should furnish the ground for agreement on, at any rate, some of the elementary parts of the doctrine. Having in mind this ultimate hope of reaching some agreement, this study approaches the task of interpretation by analyzing the formal logical structure of Spinoza's argument as that structure is exhibited in the geometrical order of demonstration.

It is impossible, of course, to avoid all discussion of interpretation of content even in a purely formal analysis, but such discussion will here be reduced to a minimum.

Spinoza chose the geometrical order of demonstration because it is the perfect embodiment of his logic of procedure. Following Descartes, Spinoza believed in the logic of starting with simple ideas which can be clearly and distinctly understood, and then—by means of these simple ideas—of building up, by carefully graduated and easily verifiable steps, the complex ideas which constitute the whole body and structure of philosophical knowledge. The complex ideas so obtained and carefully buttressed will be as clear and distinct and as readily intelligible (or as nearly so) as the simple ideas by means of which they are constructed. The geometrical order of demonstration is beautifully adapted to this type of procedure because it plainly exhibits in its literary form the construction and interdependence of ideas, as well as the internal logical articulation of the whole system of propositions.

The definitions and axioms constitute the simple ideas on which the system is based; they describe, in other words, the limits of the subject-matter. And all propositions within the range of the subject-matter they define are demonstrated by their means either directly or indirectly. The type of proof or demonstration employed is in essence analytical. In

the case of a simple proposition, the demonstration consists in showing that it is implied by the elements which have been posited as definitions or axioms. The demonstration of a complex proposition differs from this only in the respect that the given complex proposition is shown to be the logical conclusion not only of definitions and axioms but of other propositions already demonstrated. Since simple propositions which serve as analytical premisses for complex propositions have been demonstrated by or analyzed into definitions and axioms, all propositions are *ultimately* demonstrable by, or analyzable into the definitions and axioms.

Analytical demonstrations of the kind Spinoza uses throughout the *Ethics* are chiefly of the nature of logical verifications. The demonstrations verify the right of each of the propositions to form part of the system of ideas delimited by the definitions and axioms. The demonstrations verify, that is, the internal logical consistency of the system. But they hardly do anything more. They do not add to the meaning of the propositions, and they clarify them —with rare exceptions—only to the extent that they show their elementary constituents and their systemic interrelationships. That this sort of clarification is very meager, students of Spinoza have long justly complained. Spinoza too must have recognized the largely uninstructive character of his

demonstrative syllogisms, for he very often goes through them quite perfunctorily.

It is not at all fortuitously that Spinoza's propositions analytically imply the definitions and axioms. The definitions and axioms have a certain function to perform and they have been designed to perform that function. Although the definitions and axioms come first in the order of presentation, in the order of discovery they come, theoretically, last. Good fortune may discover the final definitions very early in the enquiry, but only after all the propositions of the system have been formulated can it be definitively determined whether or not a given idea is one that must be formally defined and made part of the foundations of the system. The necessity and adequacy of a fundamental definition is determined in a formal system when it is established that by means of that definition all *can be* demonstrated which the subject-matter requires *should be* demonstrated by it. We have no record of the labor that went into the *Ethics* but the *Short Treatise* makes it quite evident to us that Spinoza was far from knowing at the start just what his set of definitions and axioms had to be.

The definitions and axioms are not a magical dialectical device out of which Spinoza by logical legerdemain makes his propositions emerge. From the definitions and axioms to the First Part of the *Ethics* Spinoza does not educe the propositions of

that book. As well might one believe that the Pythagorean theorem was educed from the definitions of line and angle. The definitions and axioms to the First Part are the ultimate constitutive elements into which Spinoza found he could logically resolve his subject-matter; and therefore that they are the necessary and sufficient means for the analytical demonstration of his system of metaphysics. The definitions and axioms are crystallized out of the propositions rather than the propositions extracted from the definitions and axioms. However, in giving our analysis we shall follow the order of presentation in the *Ethics*—considering first Spinoza's definitions and axioms and then the propositions for which they have been designed. We have found, by experimentation, that any other procedure involves, in writing, too much appearance of artificiality and far too much repetition.

II

In the definitions and axioms of the First Part of the *Ethics* are to be found all the terms and ideas Spinoza needs for the demonstration of his metaphysical propositions. As we are not concerned here with Spinoza's entire metaphysical system, but only with the logical development of his doctrine on God, it is to our purpose to restrict our examination mainly to Spinoza's definitions of substance, mode, attribute and God; and to his first two axioms. The

four definitions enumerated constitute, as Pollock long ago pointed out, the complete foundations of the Spinozistic system.

Spinoza fundamentally divides all things into the uncreated and the created; the uncaused and the caused. In the *Ethics*,[1] Spinoza states this division to be axiomatic: "Everything which is, is either in itself or in another"; but in one of his letters he briefly presents the arguments which justify this classification or division. "The more recent Peripatetics," Spinoza writes to Meyer, "as I at least think, misunderstood the argument of the Ancients by which they strove to prove the existence of God. For, as I find it in the works of a certain Jew, named Rab Chasdai, it reads as follows. If there is an infinite regression of causes, then all things which exist will be things that have been caused. But it cannot pertain to anything that has been caused that it should necessarily exist in virtue of its own nature. Therefore there is in Nature nothing to whose essence it pertains that it should exist necessarily. But this is absurd; and therefore also that. Therefore the force of the argument lies not in the idea that it is impossible for the Infinite actually to exist, or that a regression of causes to infinity is impossible, but only in the impossibility of supposing that things which do not exist neces-

[1] *Ethics* I, Axiom 1. Quotations from the *Ethics* are throughout from White's translation.

sarily in virtue of their own nature, are not determined to existence by something which does exist necessarily in virtue of its own nature, and which is a Cause, not an Effect." [1] What is true of things in the order of existence is correspondingly true of ideas in the order of knowledge; those things which are in other things must be conceived through those other things in which they are; and those things which are in themselves must be conceived through themselves. As Spinoza again axiomatically puts it: "That which cannot be conceived through another must be conceived through itself." [2]

The division of all things into the uncaused and the caused, and of all ideas of things into those that can be conceived through themselves and those that need the ideas of other things through which alone they can be conceived, gives Spinoza his two basic metaphysical entities, namely substance and mode. The terms substance and mode which designate the two primary classes into which all things can be divided, are defined in strict accordance with what is laid down in the first two axioms. By substance, Spinoza understands: "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; in other words, that, the conception of which does not need the conception of another thing from which it must be formed." And by mode, he understands: "the modifications

[1] Letter XII; A. Wolf's translation.
[2] *Ethics* I, Axiom 2.

of substance, or that which is in another thing through which also it is conceived." [1] The definition of mode in terms of substance follows clearly from the argument quoted above, since that which is in another (*in alio*) must be in that which is in itself (*in se*); hence mode must be in substance.

Joachim has stated that "the antithesis of substance and its states or modifications is a more precise formulation of the popular antithesis of thing and properties." [2] This view of Joachim's is seriously wrong. The popular antithesis of thing and properties is the antithesis of subject and predicate, particular and universal. But substance and mode are *both* particulars; they are related as whole-part, as infinite particular to finite particular. Spinoza speaks of a finite body (mode) being a part of infinite body (substance); of a finite idea being part of the infinite idea;—of the finite human mind being part of the infinite divine mind.[3] A mode is not a predicate of substance; it is, to use Martineau's term, a "sample" of substance.

Spinoza has defined substance and mode in such a way that there can be no question that substance and mode exist; they have, by definition, a secure and indisputable reality. But just what specific particulars are substances and modes cannot be deter-

[1] *Ethics* I, Definitions 3 and 5.
[2] Joachim, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 15.
[3] See Letter XXXII, especially.

mined merely by an examination of the definitions. What particulars will as a matter of fact answer to the descriptions is something that must be discovered independently of the definitions. This is especially clear in the case of mode; there is more than one class of things that fulfil the requirements of the definition.

Mode denotes finite particular existents. This is its most important meaning; but it is used by Spinoza to designate more than that. It is characteristic of Spinoza's terminology that terms have various ranges of application. Any kind of existent whatsoever that is dependent upon another without which it can neither be nor be conceived is by definition necessarily a mode. Thus motion, for example, is, and is conceived through something else. Apart from the necessity for there being something which moves, motion involves transition from one position to another; i.e., motion involves the existence of extension. Without extension, motion can neither be nor be conceived. Hence motion is a mode of extension. When motion is considered absolutely, when, that is, motion of infinite body or corporeal substance is considered, then motion is infinite and must be an infinite mode; when the motion of any particular finite body is considered, then motion must be a finite mode. Thus by logical development of the definition of mode Spinoza arrives at the distinction between finite and infinite modes. The

secondary relation of a finite mode of motion to the infinite mode of motion is identical with the relation of a finite body to infinite body; it is the relation of part-whole. What is true of modes of extension is similarly true of modes of thought; within thought too, Spinoza distinguishes between finite modes and infinite modes.

III

With the definitions of substance and mode it would seem Spinoza has defined the two terms which denote the two fundamental metaphysical existents which divide the universe between them. For all existents must belong either to the class of independent existents (*in se*) or dependent existents (*in alio*); and whatever is known must be known either through itself or through something else. By virtue of Spinoza's own basal axioms there is no possibility of there being any other type of fundamental metaphysical existent; and therefore also no possibility of there being any other fundamental category of ideas. Did we need any further evidence in support of this conclusion, then we have Spinoza's own unambiguous statement—which he repeats on every appropriate occasion—that "in nature there is nothing but substances and their modes." [1] And yet, besides the definitions of substance and mode, Spinoza has definitions of at-

[1] *Ethics* I, Proposition 4. Cf. also 6, 15, 28.

tribute and God. How can these additional definitions be accounted for?

Let us first consider Spinoza's definition of attribute. An attribute must, by force of axiom, be either in itself or in another; and the idea of attribute must, again by force of axiom, be conceived either through itself or through the idea of something else. If attribute is in itself and is conceived through itself, then it is, by definition, substance; if it is in another, and is conceived through that other, then, by definition, it is mode. When we examine Spinoza's definition of attribute we find indeed that he does not tell us whether attribute is in itself or in another; or whether it is conceived through itself or through the idea of something else. What we do find is that in his definition of attribute Spinoza is really talking about the nature, not of a new metaphysical entity, but of substance which has already been defined. By attribute, Spinoza understands: "that which the intellect perceives of substance, as constituting its essence." [1] This definition, it is quite clear, does not define a third type of metaphysical existent; it *re*-defines the essence of substance from the point of view of the intellect perceiving it.

The essence of a thing is the innermost nature of that thing, its inalienable core of being; it is that which makes a thing what it is, marking it off

[1] *Ethics* I, Definition 4.

from all other things, and from which all of its properties necessarily flow. The essence of a thing is "that which being given the thing is necessarily given, and which being taken away, the thing is taken away; or, that without which the thing, and vice versa, which without the thing, can neither be nor be conceived." [1] Consequently, if the intellect perceives truly, Spinoza must mean by attribute the innermost nature of substance, that which makes substance be what it is—without which substance could neither be nor be conceived. For if the essence of a thing can no more be or be conceived without the thing than the thing can either be or be conceived without its essence, then substance without attribute or attribute without substance can neither be nor be conceived. Or, if the essence of a thing is that which when given the thing is given, and which when taken away the thing is taken away, then when attribute is given, substance is given, and when attribute is taken away, then substance is taken away. The difference between attribute and substance, if the intellect perceives truly, can therefore be only a difference of connotation; denotatively, the two terms must be equivalent.

That the intellect, according to Spinoza, does truly perceive the nature of attribute—and that therefore attribute is what substance most inalienably is—can be demonstrated *more geometrico*

[1] *Ethics* II, Definition 2.

without any lengthy examination of Spinoza's theory of knowledge. This form of demonstration is both appropriate to and sufficient for our purposes here.

The object of the intellect, whether finite or infinite, is, Spinoza says, "to comprehend the attributes of God and the modes of God and nothing else." [1] Infinite intellect, or the idea which constitutes God's mind, is the "idea of His essence and of all things which necessarily follow from His essence"; [2] that is, it is the idea of the "infinite things in infinite ways" which necessarily follows from the divine nature.[3] Of these infinite things, attributes are those things which are, as Spinoza puts it, equally in a part and the whole; the attribute of extension, for example, is equally expressed in its infinite and eternal essence in a single finite body as it is in infinite body, since "individual things are nothing but modes of God's attributes, expressing those attributes in a certain and determinate manner." [4] Now "those things which are common to everything, and are equally in the part and in the whole, can only be adequately conceived." [5] An idea which is necessarily adequate is also necessarily true; [6] therefore, the intellect can only truly perceive the nature of attribute.

[1] *Ethics* I, Proposition 30.
[2] *Ethics* II, Proposition 3.
[3] *Ethics* I, Proposition 16.
[4] *Ethics* I, Proposition 25, corollary.
[5] *Ethics* II, Proposition 38.
[6] *Ethics* II, Proposition 34.

It would not do to rest the case for the denotative equivalence of the two terms attribute and substance upon this one argument alone even though there is no reason for minimizing its strength. There are other considerations that force us to the same conclusion. The cumulative power of the several arguments—each one independent of the other—we may justly take, I believe, to be decisive.

When we read the *Ethics* by itself, we have to arrive at the denotative equivalence of attribute and substance by a process of inference. The fact that attribute and substance are separately defined and separately numbered has been a great obstacle in the way of understanding Spinoza's real intention. Fortunately, there is a passage in one of Spinoza's letters that makes plain to us that at one time in the composition of the *Ethics,* he included his definition of attribute in his definition of substance, explicitly stating that the two terms had equivalent meaning. Writing to Simon de Vries, Spinoza says: "But I do not yet see what this has to do with the understanding of the third *definition.* . . . For the *definition* as I gave it you, unless I am mistaken, reads as follows: By substance I mean that which is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, whose conception does not involve the conception of some other thing. I mean the same by attribute, except that it is called attribute with respect to the intellect, which attributes such and such

a nature to substance. This definition, I say, explains clearly enough what I wish you to understand by *substance* or *attribute*. You, however, wish me to explain by means of an example, which it is very easy to do, how *one and the same thing* can be called by two *names*. But, not to seem niggardly, I will supply two examples. First, I say that by the name of Israel I mean the third Patriarch; I also mean the same Patriarch by the name Jacob, since the name Jacob was given to him because he had seized his brother's heel. Secondly, by plane I mean that which reflects all the rays of light without change; I mean the same by white, except that it is called white in relation to a man who is looking at the plane (surface)." [1]

This letter, taken by itself, does not, of course, prove anything more than that at the time of writing to de Vries, Spinoza held the views he there expresses. This is what Joachim contends. He maintains that by the time Spinoza perfected the *Ethics*, he had changed his views on the relation of attribute to substance. According to Joachim—who may be taken as representative of a whole school of interpreters—the identification of substance and attribute is characteristic of Spinoza only while he was a follower of the Cartesian philosophy; only then did he speak indifferently of extended substance or the attribute of extension, of thinking

[1] Letter IX, A. Wolf's translation (italics mine).

substance or the attribute of thought; but when Spinoza fully developed his own metaphysics, so the argument runs, he distinguished rigorously between the two. The force of Joachim's contention is somewhat weakened by his admission that "traces of the older inaccurate terminology" survive not only in the letters but also in the scholium to Proposition 15, of the First Part. It must be granted, of course, that if there were to be found in the *Ethics* only one reference to the "older inaccurate terminology" Joachim's interpretation would not be seriously invalidated, for it is quite easy to understand how Spinoza could lapse once into an antiquated and inexact form of expression, especially in a scholium where the writing is controversial. But when we examine the text of the *Ethics* very closely, we find that the "older inaccurate terminology" survives not only in the controversial scholium referred to; it survives throughout the propositions and demonstrations of the metaphysical portions of the *Ethics,* that is, throughout Spinoza's whole constructive argument. This being the case, as will be shown in detail, there is of course nothing for us to do but to accept the denotative equivalence of the two terms. And when we do so we are not faced with the impossibility of reading Spinoza's text in a straightforward and intelligible manner; indeed, it is they who seek in one way or another to distinguish radically between

substance and attribute who find themselves in this unhappy predicament. The interpretation here advanced makes possible a consistent reading of the *Ethics,* a reading that does not require us, as so many other readings do, to render some propositions in a strict and some in a loose fashion. And at no point are we forced to condemn the logicality of the sequence of Spinoza's propositions but are enabled to see in them a rigid continuity and development of thought.

(a) There is one place in the *Ethics* where Spinoza states, almost as plainly as he does in his letter to de Vries, that by substance and attribute he means the same thing: "There is nothing therefore outside the intellect by which a number of things can be distinguished one from another, but *substances* or (*which is the same thing by Def. 4*) their attributes and affections." [1]

(b) Spinoza does not, in his definition of attribute, tell us whether attribute is in itself or in another; whether it must be conceived through itself or through the idea of something else. If attribute is a distinct metaphysical entity, he should have done this because it is by these characteristics that metaphysical entities, according to his axioms, are alone distinguished. Instead of *defining* attribute in the manner in which he defined substance and mode, Spinoza *proves* that attribute is in itself and

[1] *Ethics* I, Proposition 4, dem. (italics mine).

is conceived through itself; and he proves this by means of the definition of attribute which asserts that attribute is the essence of substance and therefore what is true of substance must be true of attribute. This is clear beyond any misconception in the demonstration of *Ethics* I, Proposition 10. The proposition to be proved is that "each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself"; the proof is as follows: "for an attribute is that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence (Def. 4) and therefore (Def. 3) it must be conceived through itself."

Furthermore, in the scholium to the same Proposition, Spinoza draws the consequence that necessarily follows from the fact that each attribute must be conceived through itself, namely, that each attribute is causally independent of every other "nor could one be produced by another." Now it is characteristic of all modes, infinite and finite, that one mode can produce another;[1] it is characteristic only of substance that "one substance cannot produce another substance,"[2] so that in this vital respect there is again complete identity between attribute and substance. It cannot be argued against this conclusion that although one attribute cannot produce another, and although modes could not produce attributes, still substance produces

[1] *Ethics* I, Propositions 23, 28.
[2] *Ethics* I, Proposition 6.

attributes. If this argument were valid attributes would have to be conceived through substance, not through themselves because "the knowledge of an effect depends upon and involves the knowledge of the cause." [1] But since attributes are demonstrated to be *conceived* through themselves, they must also *be* in themselves. Spinoza does not state in so many words that attributes are in themselves (*in se*) but apart from the arguments for this conclusion just presented, we have the propositions in which Spinoza proves that attributes involve *necessary existence,* or are eternal. And, by definition, that whose nature involves necessary existence is a *causa sui,* that is, is in itself.[2] Spinoza's own demonstration of the eternity of attributes is worth citing because it reveals once more in how matter of fact fashion Spinoza takes it that what is true of substance is also true of attribute. "By the attributes of God is to be understood that which (Def. 4) expresses the essence of the divine substance, that is to say, that which pertains to substance. It is this, I say, which the attributes themselves must involve. But eternity pertains to the nature of substance (Prop. 7). Therefore each of the attributes must involve eternity, and therefore all are eternal." [3] There is no special purpose in citing many ex-

[1] *Ethics* I, Axiom 4.
[2] *Ethics* I, Definition 1, Proposition 7.
[3] *Ethics* I, Proposition 19, dem.

amples; almost the whole First Part could be cited to prove the contention that Spinoza constantly uses the definition of substance as a means for proving propositions about the nature of attribute. I will cite, however, one more case, the demonstration of the second proposition. This proposition reads: "Two substances whose attributes are different, have nothing in common"; the demonstration reads as follows: "This is evident from Def. 3. For each substance must be in itself and must be conceived through itself, that is to say, the conception of one does not involve the conception of the other." Unless substance and attribute denote one and the same thing, this demonstration of the proposition would not only be invalid; it would be totally irrelevant. Because if attributes are not in themselves and conceived through themselves it does not follow that two substances whose attributes are different have nothing in common. The validity of the demonstration depends upon the nature of attribute, at least as much as upon the nature of substance. Yet in the demonstration, the definition of attribute is not even referred to. What Spinoza does is prove something about attribute by exclusively using the definition of substance. This he can validly do only if he considers the two to be denotatively equivalent, only if he considers attribute really to be the essence of substance.

(c) Spinoza tells us in his definition of attribute

what relation attribute bears to substance; but he does not tell us what relation attribute bears to mode; nor does he, in his definition of mode, tell us what relation mode bears to attribute. If attribute were a metaphysical entity distinct from substance he could not be guilty of such a far-reaching omission—at least not with impunity. When we reach the Corollary to I, 25, however, we discover that Spinoza there states that modes bear precisely the same relationship to attribute that they have been defined to bear to substance. This Corollary reads: "Individual things are nothing but affections or modes of God's attributes. This is evident from Prop. 15 and Def. 5." Definition 5 contains no reference to attribute but defines mode solely as affection or modification of substance; and when we examine the demonstration of Proposition 15 we find that there too nothing whatever is said of the relation of mode to attribute; in fact, nothing at all is said about attributes in that Proposition. The only thing discoverable there that bears upon the issue is a reference to Definition 5. Actually, therefore, Spinoza establishes that modes are affections of attribute by means of the definition of mode alone. He could validly do this only if by attribute and substance he means denotatively the same thing; then whatever applies to the one necessarily applies also to the other. And that Spinoza does take this stand, we have no room to doubt. In sub-

sequent propositions of the *Ethics* we find that Spinoza speaks of modes as being indifferently modifications of attribute or modifications of substance.

To summarize the results we have reached so far concerning the nature of attribute: Attribute is the real essence of substance, that which substance is in its innermost being. For this reason Spinoza can justly use the definition of substance to demonstrate propositions about attribute. If substance and attribute were anything other than the same thing, this procedure would violate the most elementary rules of logic, and the whole argument of the *Ethics* would be vitiated since the later propositions depend upon the earlier ones. Also, we have discovered that attribute is stated and proved to have precisely the same basic characteristics possessed by substance: (1) attribute is in itself and is conceived through itself; (2) its essence involves necessary existence; (3) it is *causa sui;* and (4) it bears the relation to mode which the definition of mode ascribes to substance. If these arguments still do not prove the denotative equivalence of attribute and substance, then in further support, the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, which Spinoza establishes in *Ethics* I, 5, could be invoked, as proving on the ground of a general principle that two things which differ from one another in no essential respect, are essentially one and the same thing.

However, this conclusion will receive its final test and confirmation in the next chapter where we analyze particularly the first fifteen propositions of the *Ethics,* for it is in these propositions that Spinoza presents the chief feature of his doctrine on God.

It is not at all a strange thing that Spinoza should use two terms to denote the same thing. It is a well-established practice of his. Besides Substance and Attribute, we have such pairs of terms as God and Nature, Perfection and Reality, Virtue and Power. The only peculiarity of the extra term attribute is that it is separately defined and numbered. In the other cases cited, this procedure is not followed; the terms are plainly stated to be equivalent, and, in the instances of Perfection and Reality, Virtue and Power, these pairs of terms are included within the same definition. At one time, as we have seen, the same was true of Attribute and Substance; they too were included in one definition. The question arises, therefore, What made Spinoza make an exception in the case of attribute? Why did he not leave it as a part of the definition of substance? Why, in the completed form of the *Ethics,* did he find it necessary to have two definitions when only one would seem to be needed?

The answer to these questions cannot be found, as we have seen, in any change in doctrine concerning the nature of attribute that took place between

respects were, from the start, actually equal in all respects. Nevertheless it is necessary for Euclid to ignore this, and to start with two triangles because otherwise his formal geometrical demonstration would be impossible.

Spinoza was guided by the example of Euclid in defining attribute separately. By doing this, he had really two definitions of substance—one definition stating what substance is in the order of existence; the other stating what substance is in the order of knowledge. And having these two definitions, he could, like Euclid, proceed *more geometrico* to demonstrate what he wished about the nature of substance. For, in the order of nature, there are besides substance, only modes. But the definition of mode can only serve to demonstrate what relation modes bear to substance and vice versa; by its means nothing can be demonstrated of the nature of substance as it is in itself. And to demonstrate what substance is in itself is the object of Propositions 2 to 20. It was therefore necessary for Spinoza to have another definition that would be equal to the definition of substance, and yet be sufficiently different in *form,* to allow him to consider substance in different ways, to make analyses and comparisons, and to demonstrate his results geometrically. The definition of attribute allows for just this. It is formally independent of the definition of substance and hence there is no formal beg-

ging the question when it is employed. It defines the essence of substance and hence enables you to treat of substance. The two definitions can be used, in a sense, interchangeably; that is, as we have seen, the definition of attribute can be used to demonstrate propositions about the nature of substance, and the definition of substance to demonstrate propositions about the nature of attribute.

The necessity Spinoza was under for having a separate definition of the essence of substance in order to be able to demonstrate geometrically propositions about the nature of substance can be illustrated by two of the fundamental propositions in the *Ethics*. The second Proposition is to prove that "two substances having different attributes have nothing in common with one another." Without a separate definition of attribute this proposition could hardly be even significantly stated, let alone geometrically proved. Spinoza would have been forced to say, without a separate definition of attribute, that "two substances (or what is the same thing, two attributes) which are different have nothing in common." This statement is not very significant; it is an obvious tautology; there would be nothing to demonstrate geometrically and even if there were, it could not be so demonstrated. The same is true of the fifth Proposition, that "in nature there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute." This proposition,

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without a separate definition of attribute, would have to be formulated something like this: "there cannot exist in nature two or more substances (or what is the same thing, two or more attributes) which are the same." This proposition does, it is true, make sense; but, what is equally true, it does not admit of formal geometrical demonstration. In a system geometrically demonstrated, it would have to stand as a dogmatic statement.

Even if Spinoza did not require a separate definition for other propositions it would be quite sufficient that these propositions need, for their geometrical demonstration a separate definition of attribute, to make such separate definition imperative. For unless these two propositions can be geometrically demonstrated, the remaining essential propositions of the First Part cannot be geometrically demonstrated since—to trace the interdependence of the first fifteen propositions—I, 6 depends upon I, 5 and I, 2; I, 7 upon I, 6; I, 8 upon I, 7 and I, 5; I, 11 upon I, 7; I, 12 upon I, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8; I, 13 upon I, 5 and I, 11; I, 14 upon I, 5 and I, 11; I, 15 upon I, 14. All fifteen propositions would be incapable of being geometrically demonstrated; which simply means that the First Part could not be so demonstrated since—to trace the interdependence of the propositions subsequent to I, 15—I, 17 depends upon I, 15; I, 18 upon I, 14 and I, 15; I,

19 upon I, 7 and I, 11; I, 20 upon I, 19; I, 21 and I, 22 upon I, 11 and I, 20; I, 23 upon I, 15, I, 19, and I, 21; I, 25 upon I, 15; I, 26 upon I, 16 and I, 25; I, 28 upon I, 21, 22, 24, 25, and 26; I, 29 upon I, 11, 15, 16, 21, 24, 26, and 27; I, 30 upon I, 14 and I, 15; I, 31 upon I, 15 and I, 29; I, 32 upon I, 23 and 28; I, 33 upon I, 11, 14, 16 and 29; I, 34 upon I, 11 and I, 16; I, 35 upon I, 34; I, 36 upon I, 16, 25 and 34. And if the First Part could not be geometrically demonstrated the whole of the *Ethics* would have to be cast into another form since the succeeding Parts are dependent to greater or lesser extent upon the First Part.

## IV

We have now to consider Spinoza's definition of God. The preliminary argument used when we considered the definition of attribute applies with equal force to the definition of God. God must, by force of axiom, be either in Himself (*in se*) or in something else (*in alio*); that is, God must either be substance or mode. When we examine Spinoza's definition of God we find that he is not defining a kind of metaphysical existent which is different from substance and mode; he is defining a substance which consists of infinite attributes. The definition reads: "By God I understand Being absolutely infinite, that is to say, substance consisting of infinite

attributes, each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence." [1]

The conception of God as a Being absolutely infinite, contained in Spinoza's definition, is the traditional conception of God as a supremely perfect being, an *Ens Realissimum.* Spinoza has taken this conception and defined it more carefully and more significantly than had been done before. The general consideration that guided him in the construction of his definition we learn from a letter to Tschirnhaus. "When I define God as the supremely perfect Being, since this definition does not express the efficient cause (for I conceive that an efficient cause can be internal as well as external) I shall not be able to discover all the properties of God from it; but when I define God as a *Being,* etc. (see *Definition VI, Part I of the Ethics*) . . . I know that I can deduce from it all (His) properties." [2] From another letter to Tschirnhaus we learn that Spinoza did not question the validity of the idea of God as a supremely perfect or absolutely infinite Being; Spinoza concerned himself only with developing the implications of this conception in accordance with the principles of his philosophy. "The axiom of the scholium to Proposition X, Part I, as I suggested at the end of that scholium, we form from the idea which we have of

[1] *Ethics* I, Definition 6.
[2] Letter LX. A. Wolf's translation.

an absolutely infinite Being, and not from the fact that there are, or may be, beings with three, four or more attributes." [1]

It goes without saying that God must by Spinoza be defined as having or as consisting of attributes. Tradition was firm on this point; and just as Spinoza retains the term God, instead of consistently using the term Nature, he also naturally uses the term attribute. (This is another reason why Spinoza could not discard the term attribute, but had to re-define it in terms of substance.) Spinoza's argument showing why God must be defined as consisting of no less than infinite attributes each of them infinite in its own kind is a very simple one. "Nothing is clearer," he says, "than that Being absolutely infinite is necessarily defined as we have shown (Def. 6) as Being which consists of infinite attributes each one of which expresses a certain essence, eternal and infinite . . . [for] each being must be conceived under some attribute, and the more reality or being it has, the more attributes it possesses expressing necessity or eternity and infinity." [2] This argument is the same as his more succinct statement in the Explanation to the Definition of God.

Although Spinoza repeatedly states that the more reality a being has the more attributes must

[1] Letter LXIV. A. Wolf's translation.
[2] *Ethics* I, Proposition 10, schol.

be predicated of it,[1] there have not been wanting interpretations that maintain that Spinoza is compelled by virtue of the doctrine that *determinatio est negatio* to deny all predicates of God; and therefore that his conception of God is a pure abstraction, empty of all content. With this view we disagree. Spinoza makes use of the phrase "determination is negation" in one of his letters: "As to the doctrine that figure is negation, and not something positive, it is clearly evident that the totality of matter, considered without limitation, can have no figure and that figure has a place only in finite and limited bodies. For he who says that he apprehends a figure wants to express thereby nothing else than that he is apprehending a limited thing, and how it is limited. The limitation, therefore, does not belong to the thing in virtue of its being, but, on the contrary, it is its not-being. Since, then, figure is nothing but limitation and limitation is negation (*determinatio est negatio*) therefore, as has been said, it can be nothing but negation." [2] It is clear from the context, and especially so in Mr. Wolf's translation, that Spinoza employs the expression *determinatio est negatio* when he is concerned with finite, and not infinite, things. In the *Ethics,* the term "determinate" is unfailingly used in similar fashion.

[1] *Ethics* I, Definition 6; Explanation; Propositions I, 8, schol. I, 9; and 10, schol.; Letter IX.
[2] Letter L., A. Wolf's translation.

It is true that some theologians considered God to be superior to any specifiable attributes; but we know that Spinoza thought that it was not beneath God's spiritual nature even to be extended. By preying upon the ambiguity of the term "determination" we can come to the conclusion that God must be empty of all content so as not to be "determined." The ambiguity rests in the fact that "determination" may mean either setting a limit to, or giving a character to. When we confuse these two meanings and hold that to give a character to a thing is to limit it we have no difficulty in deriving any paradoxical conclusion we may desire. Spinoza, however, never maintained that to give a character to a thing is to limit it; he consistently maintained that to give a character to a thing is to give it reality or being. This is stated as explicitly as one could desire in Scholium 1 to Proposition 8 of the First Part: "Since finiteness is in truth partly negation and infinitude absolute affirmation of existence *of some kind,* it follows from Proposition 7 alone, that all substance must be infinite." [1] Hence God must be given infinite attributes so that he may have infinite being or reality, that he may be supremely perfect.

There are interpretations which agree that Spinoza's God is not a purely empty abstraction, but has definite characteristics or attributes. But many, if not all of these interpretations, maintain that in

[1] Italics mine.

some way or other the infinite number of attributes must be reduced to two, or even one. In Western philosophy mind and body, thought and extension, have been the two exclusive categories in terms of which the universe has been construed. Sometimes both thought and extension are given equal reality as characteristics of the world; sometimes the one or the other has been made *the* reality and the other derogated to mere appearance. This inveterate habit of thinking exclusively in terms of mind and body, or of mind alone (idealism) or of body alone (materialism) has tried, time and again, to fix itself upon Spinoza's system. Idealistic interpretations of the attributes of Spinoza's God base themselves squarely on the fact that attribute is defined as that which the *intellect* perceives as constituting the nature of substance; and hence, all attributes other than mind are simply the subjective expressions of mind. Materialistic interpretations, on the other hand, support themselves on the fact that the mind is defined as the idea of the body; and therefore the only thing that possesses ultimate reality is the body. Other interpretations accept that mind and body have equal standing in Spinoza's system but the other attributes are, as S. Alexander[1] recently put it, "otiose" and meaningless. The purpose of this essay is logical, not metaphysical. It may be that a true metaphysics

[1] S. Alexander: *Spinoza and Time.*

does not need infinite attributes, that Spinoza's ascribing to God an infinite number was a wild and fantastic act of the imagination. All we are concerned to determine here is whether Spinoza *did* ascribe an infinite number of attributes to God and whether he intended them all to be real and objective characteristics of God's nature. That Spinoza intended the attributes to be real and objective we can determine by propositions which are crucial on this point. As we have already seen, Spinoza asserts that one attribute cannot produce another, that all attributes are eternally together in God. From this it follows as inevitably as it does obviously that there is no causal relation between attributes. However, in subsequent Parts of the *Ethics* Spinoza recurs to this same point, and we are spared the need for drawing the conclusion ourselves. "The body," Spinoza says, "cannot determine the mind to thought, neither can the mind determine the body to motion nor rest, nor to anything else, if there be anything else." [1] This proposition is proved by means of a proposition which applies to all of God's attributes, asserting their complete causal independence of each other. "The modes of any attribute have God for a cause only in so far as He is considered under that attribute of which they are modes, and not in so far as He

[1] *Ethics* III, Proposition 2.

is considered under any other attribute." [1] This proposition is proved, in turn, by means of Proposition 10 of the First Part (which we have discussed above) in which Spinoza proves that each attribute is conceived by itself and without another. Since the infinite attributes of God are all causally independent of and causally unrelated to each other, it follows necessarily that if they are at all, then they must be objective and real. We must either deny that God has any attributes in Spinoza's system or else assert that He has an infinite number, all of them possessing equal objectivity and reality.

But when we grant that the infinite attributes are real and objective, each existing causally independent of the other, what happens to the unity of God? Is not His unity shattered into infinite fragments? Is His unity at best anything more than the sum of His attributes? There are expressions in the *Ethics* which would seem to support the interpretation that the term God merely designates the sum of the attributes. Proposition 19 reads: "God is eternal or, in other words, all His attributes are eternal." (*Deus, sive omnia Dei attributa sunt æterna.*) This is repeated in the second Corollary to the next proposition: "God is immutable or (which is the same thing) all His attributes are immutable." (*Sequitur, Deum, sive omnia Dei attributa esse immutabilia.*) In opposition to these

[1] *Ethics* II, Proposition 6.

pronouncements there is Spinoza's unambiguous reiteration that God is One. How can the two assertions be reconciled? Camerer[1] and others maintain that this opposition cannot be overcome, that the unity of God and the infinity of attributes stand in unrelievable contradiction one with another.

It is true that Spinoza nowhere clearly explains[2] how God's unity can persist despite the diversity of His attributes but there are sufficient indications to show us how that unity must be understood. The clue we need is to be found in the nature of man. Man is a mode of the attributes of thought and extension; but because he is a mode of two diverse attributes he is not, according to Spinoza any the less *one* individual. Camerer does not hesitate to say that the unity of man's nature is no less shattered and impossible to conceive on Spinoza's principles of the relation of mind and body than is God's nature. And for the same reason: qualitative diversity does not permit the real existence of unity. However, the reason why for Spinoza man is not two distinct individuals is because the *order* of ideas in man's mind is the *same* as the *order* of causes in man's body. The divisive duality in man's nature is overcome by the unifying singleness of order discoverable in both parts of man's nature.

[1] *Die Lehre Spinoza's,* p. 9 ff.
[2] See Letter XXXII.

If the order and connection of ideas in man's mind differed from the order and connection of causes in man's body, then man would indeed be two separate individuals. His unity, in such case would be, at best, only nominal, the unity of the sum of his parts. But the singleness of order is not merely a sum of parts; it is a principle that truly unifies; indeed, it is because of the singleness of order that Spinoza sometimes refers to mind and body as *aspects* instead of as parts, of man's nature.

It is more than merely probable that Spinoza's conception of the relation of the attributes of God other than thought and extension was determined by his conception of the relation between thought and extension in man. Since the only attributes we do know actually are these two, it is difficult to understand how else Spinoza could have come to any conclusions concerning attributes whose existence is demanded solely by the formal consideration that God is an absolutely infinite or supremely perfect being.

What is true of man's nature is true of God's—since man is nothing more than a mode of two of God's attributes. In the scholium to Proposition 7 of the Second Part, Spinoza almost as much as says so. "The circle existing in nature and the idea that is in God of an existing circle are one and the same thing, which is manifested through different attributes; and, therefore, whether we think of nature

under the attribute of extension or under the attribute of thought or under any other attribute whatever, we shall discover *one and the same order,* or one and the same connection of causes; that is to say, in every case, the same *sequence* of events. *Nor have I had any other reason* for saying that God is the cause of the idea, for example, of the circle in so far only as He is a thinking thing, and of the circle itself in so far as He is an extended thing, but this, that the formal Being of the idea of a circle can only be perceived through another mode of thought as its proximate cause, and this again must be perceived through another, and so on *ad infinitum*. So that when things are considered as modes of thought, we must explain the *order* of the whole of nature or the connection of causes by the attribute of thought alone, and when things are considered as modes of extension, the *order* of the whole of nature must be explained through the attribute of extension alone, *and so with other attributes.*" [1] Neither in this scholium nor in any other place does Spinoza ever tell us anything directly about the attributes other than thought and extension; he always states that what holds of thought and extension also holds of them. The ground for Spinoza's conviction is none other than his belief in the regularity and uniformity of God's nature.

[1] *Ethics* II, Proposition 7. schol. (italics mine).

God must not, of course, be identified simply with the *order* discoverable in Him. God consists of infinite attributes and the *order* of events within these attributes can never supersede in reality the attributes themselves. It is not the order *instead of* the attributes that gives us God's nature; it is the order *within* the attributes (and therefore in addition to the attributes) that gives us that. This may appear very unsatisfactory to some; some may still maintain that the contradiction remains unrelieved. But surely it is not an indisputable axiom that real unity is impossible with qualitative diversity. Unless we are ready to admit that internal qualitative diversity is necessarily incompatible with individuality or unity, there is no reason why we should admit that Spinoza's God loses His unity in the infinite diversity of His attributes. It is well to keep in mind, moreover, that Spinoza was writing at a time when mechanical concepts held exclusive sway. The concept of an organism had not yet made its appearance on the intellectual horizon. Even though Spinoza maintained that all things are in various degrees animated, yet when he came to explain the nature of the human body, he did so, following Descartes, wholly in terms of the mechanical laws of motion. The intellectual tools Spinoza had at his command were altogether inadequate for the clear expression of his ideas. But what his idea of God is, despite the obscurity of his statement, is in general

outline, at any rate, sufficiently clear and consistent.

There is one more element in Spinoza's definition of God that has to be discussed: the use and meaning of the term substance. God of course must be a "substance" because He is in Himself and must be conceived through Himself. There is no difficulty here. But what is the relation of substance consisting of infinite attributes (God) to substance as defined in Definition 3 which we have shown is denotatively equivalent to attribute, and not to an infinite number of attributes? We can best come to understand the meaning of Spinoza's usage of the term substance if we first consider his usage of the terms "idea" and "body." These three terms—substance, idea and body—embrace the total content of Spinoza's known universe.

Spinoza uses the term idea to designate (1) an absolutely simple idea. This is clear from a passage in the *De Emendatione*. "If the idea of a thing be very simple, it cannot but be clear and distinct; for such a thing cannot be known in part, but either as a whole or not at all." (2) Spinoza uses the term idea to denote a finitely complex idea, consisting of a number of simple ideas: "The *idea* which constitutes the formal Being of the human mind is *not simple,* but is composed of a number of ideas" (II, 15). (3) Spinoza uses the term idea to designate an infinitely complex idea, consisting of an infinite number of simple ideas: "The *idea* of God

from which *infinite numbers* of things follow in *infinite* ways, can be *one* only" (II, 4). "The *ideas* of non-existent individual things are comprehended in the infinite *idea* of God . . ." (II, 8).

We find upon examination that Spinoza uses the term "body" correspondingly in the same three senses in which he uses the term "idea." (1) We understand from the following sentence in Axiom 2 that Spinoza has been using in his first Axioms and Lemmas the term body to mean absolutely simple bodies: "Thus much for simplest bodies which are distinguished from one another by motion and rest, speed and slowness *alone;* let us now advance to composite bodies." (2) The term body is used to designate a finitely complex (composite) body: "When a *number of bodies* of the same or of different magnitudes are pressed together by others . . . these *bodies* are said to be mutually united, and taken altogether they are said to compose *one* body or individual" (Definition after Axiom 2). (3) The term body is used to designate an infinitely complex body: "Up to this point we have conceived an individual to be composed . . . of the most simple bodies. If we now consider an individual of another kind, composed of many individuals of diverse natures, we shall discover that it may be affected in many other ways, its nature nevertheless being preserved. . . . Thus if we advance *ad infinitum,* we may easily conceive the whole of Nature

to be *one* individual, whose parts, that is to say, *all bodies* differ in *infinite* ways without any change of the whole *individual*" (Lemma 7, schol.).

Now unless we recognize that Spinoza uses the term "substance" as he uses the terms "idea" and "body," that is, in the three different senses just pointed out, we cannot possibly read his propositions on God without accusing him of most outrageous confusion or redundancy or both. (1) Spinoza uses the term substance to designate an absolutely simple substance, that is a substance consisting of only one attribute; this is evident from the definitions of substance and attribute; it is also more plainly evident in the following sentence: "Substance which has *only one attribute* cannot exist except as substance" (I, 8, dem.). (2) Spinoza uses the term substance to designate a finitely complex substance, that is a substance consisting of more than one, but not necessarily of infinite attributes: "It is very far from being absurd to ascribe to one substance a *number* of attributes" (I, 10, dem.). (3) Spinoza uses the term substance to designate an infinitely complex substance, that is a substance consisting of infinite attributes: "God or substance consisting of infinite attributes . . ." (I, 11).

It must be understood, of course, that in Nature neither absolutely simple ideas, nor absolutely simple bodies, nor absolutely simple substances

exist. Indeed, when we consider the whole of infinite Nature then only one absolutely infinite idea (consisting of an infinite number of simple ideas) and only one absolutely infinite body (consisting of an infinite number of simple bodies) as well as only one absolutely infinite substance (consisting of an infinite number of simple substances or attributes) exist. But Spinoza first considers in the intellectual order of presentation, simple ideas, simple bodies, and, as we shall see in the next chapter, simple substances because it is his fundamental methodological rule to start with simples and by means of them to build up systematically the complex.

If we consider the definition of God from a strictly logical point of view, we can now see how Spinoza constructed it. God is metaphysically a unity, but He is a unity in diversity. For purposes of logical analysis it will be best to speak of God as a complex entity, not meaning thereby to impugn in any way His real unity. That is to be understood all along.

God, then, is a complex entity; the idea of God, is therefore, correspondingly, a complex idea. The method we should pursue in seeking to discover God's nature so that it may be defined, is the same as the method we should pursue in seeking to discover the nature of any other thing, ideas or bodies for example. Does the complex entity God consist of simple constituents? If so, are the simple con-

stituents all of one general sort, or are there many sorts of simple constituents? Spinoza's definition of God plainly answers these questions: God is a complex entity consisting of only one sort of simple constituent; that simple constituent is attribute (substance). Simple substance (or attribute) is infinite only in its own kind; God is absolutely infinite; therefore God must be defined as consisting of an infinite number of attributes (substances). God, that is, must be defined in terms of substance or attribute, since substance or attribute is the simple constituent of God's nature.[1]

Yet how can this be done without involving oneself in dialectical difficulties? It will not do to define God as a "Being absolutely infinite, that is, a Being consisting of infinite attributes" because attribute has been defined with reference to substance, not with reference to "being." Hence if God is defined as a *Being consisting of infinite attributes,* there is nothing in this definition to indicate that the infinite attributes express the essence of God's nature. There is nothing in the definition to prevent our inferring that God is something which transcends the infinite attributes; or something which has the attributes but is different from them; or something in which the attributes inhere, as quali-

[1] For a contemporary example of a definition constructed in similar fashion see the definition of number in Russell's *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy.*

ties are in traditional metaphysics defined to inhere in the subject. With such a definition it will be impossible rigorously to prove any proposition concerning the nature of God and His attributes: the ambiguity of the definition will necessarily infect and vitiate the validity of any proof.

For the same reasons God cannot be adequately defined as a *Being consisting of infinite substances,* for substance is defined as that which is in itself and is conceived through itself, and as God is (in this conjectural definition) defined, we do not know how these infinite substances are related to God or whether God is a single integrated entity.

This problem *in definition* Spinoza solved by using the two terms substance and attribute. Just as substance is identical with its attribute, being one and the same thing viewed and named in two different ways, so is God a Being at one with His attributes. The infinite attributes are not merely attributes which God has; they are not predicates stuck into a substantive; the infinite attributes *are* God; they constitute His nature. The term substance besides stating that God is in Himself and must be conceived through Himself, also mediates between the terms "attribute" and "being."

We have now examined the four definitions it is necessary to understand in order to be able formally to analyze the propositions on God in the First Part of the *Ethics*. Before we proceed to that

task one further comment on the order in which these definitions are stated may not be out of place. First we have the definition of substance; then the definition of attribute which is a re-definition of substance; then the definition of mode which must be defined with respect to substance since mode is *in alio,* and hence must be in substance. Finally the definition of God which must be defined in terms of substance and attribute; but it cannot be defined until mode has been defined since modes are in substance and by virtue of that are in God. The definition of God must, therefore, come fourth, summing up, as it does, the results of the three antecedent definitions.

CHAPTER TWO

## *The Simplicity of Substance and the Unity of God*

I

The opening propositions of the *Ethics* have been a constant source of perplexity for students of Spinoza. The solution of the difficulties these propositions present that has commended itself to interpreters as being the best, is the solution of virtually reading these propositions out of Spinoza's doctrine. This point of view is most emphatically expressed by Sigwart: "The first seven or eight propositions can only be explained if we assume that Spinoza is attacking the ordinary conception of substance. To any one who has Spinoza's own conception of Substance in mind, they cannot but appear almost ridiculous." [1] Joachim, although not quite so emphatic, really assumes the same stand; he says that Spinoza defines God "as one Substance amongst others . . . a view which no doubt reflected popular opinion. . . . The first fourteen propositions develop the definitions of God and Substance and thus show that the popular view is untenable." [2] Wolfson, in his detailed historical

[1] Sigwart, *Der Spinozismus, historisch und philosophisch erlautert,* p. 238. Quoted by Joachim, op. cit.
[2] Joachim, loc. cit., p. 37.

analysis of the propositions in question, agrees in essence with Sigwart and Joachim when he asserts that Spinoza is, in his first six propositions, presenting his refutation of "philosophic dualism." [1] However these interpreters may differ from one another, they are in fundamental agreement on the view that the first propositions of the *Ethics* have nothing to do directly with Spinoza's own positive doctrine.

In opposition to this, the interpretation here advanced is that the opening propositions (be they six or eight) are the indispensable preliminary propositions by means of which Spinoza establishes his own positive doctrine. In his first propositions Spinoza is engaged in the important task of laying the foundations of his own doctrine of Substance not in undermining the conception of any one else. There is, in Propositions I-XV, a gradual logical development of one consistent and constructive argument; step by step Spinoza leads up to his culminating Proposition that "Whatever is, is in God and nothing can either be or be conceived without God" (I, 15).

Spinoza is, in the first six propositions, concerned with establishing the irrefragable simplicity of substance infinite in its own kind; that is the simplicity of substance of Definition 3. We find therefore, throughout the first six propositions, the unequiv-

[1] H. A. Wolfson, *Chronicon Spinozanum* II, p. 92.

ocal and unimpeachable plural form "substances." This plural form would be unthinkably erroneous did substance mean only God. For God is One, and only the singular form "substance" would be permissible. It is on this that Sigwart and those who follow him base their interpretations.[1] But if we distinguish between the various meanings of the term substance, pointed out above, we can come to understand the meaning and order of Spinoza's propositions without having either to deny Spinoza's unequivocal use of the plural form "substances" or to construe those propositions in which this plural form occurs in such a way that they have no proper place in Spinoza's own system. In the following discussion the difference between substance infinite only in its own kind (Def. 3) and Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6) must be clearly kept in mind. The difference may be appropriately registered by using a small "s" for the former and a capital "S" for the latter.

Spinoza establishes in I, 1 the general relationship of modes to substance. That "substance is by its nature prior to its modes" is demonstrated by a simple reference to the definitions of substance (Def. 3) and mode (Def. 5). Spinoza needs this proposition in order to be able to demonstrate I, 5.

[1] For a detailed discussion of the views of some of these authors see my "In Defense of Spinoza," in *The Journal of Philosophy,* March 4, 1926.

The absolute simplicity of substance (Def. 3) Spinoza establishes in I, 2 and I, 5. In I, 2 Spinoza demonstrates (by means of Definition 3 alone) that "Two substances having different attributes have nothing in common with one another"; in I, 5 he proves that "In nature there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute." For the demonstration of I, 5 Spinoza needs to demonstrate the proposition that "Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another either by the difference of the attributes of the substances or by the difference of their modes" (I, 4); this he does by means of Definitions 3 and 5 and Axiom 1.

Propositions I, 2 and I, 5 are not redundant as they may appear to be at first glance. All that is demonstrated in I, 2 is that *if* two substances have *different* attributes then they have nothing in common. This proposition does not demonstrate however that two substances can *not* have the *same* attribute. If one substance can have an attribute which is the *same* as the attribute which another substance has, then it would follow that such two substances would have something in common, although two substances which have *different* attributes have nothing in common. In order to establish the absolute simplicity and diversity of substances (Def. 3) it is necessary, that is, to demonstrate that two substances (Def. 3) can *not* have the

same attribute, as well as to demonstrate that two substances (Def. 3) having *different* attributes have nothing in common. It is necessary to demonstrate I, 5 as well as I, 2.

From I, 2 and I, 5 and the Axioms on causality it follows that "one substance cannot be produced by another substance" (I, 6). Since "there cannot in nature be two substances of the same attribute (I, 5), that is to say, two which have anything in common with one another (I, 2)" one substance (Def. 3) "cannot be the cause of the other, that is to say, one cannot be produced by the other" (I, 3). Proposition I, 3 that "if two things have nothing in common with one another, one cannot be the cause of the other," is demonstrated by referring to the Axioms on causality, namely that "the knowledge of an effect depends upon and involves the knowledge of the cause" (Axiom 3) and "those things which have nothing mutually in common with one another cannot through one another be mutually understood" (Axiom 4).

That one substance (Def. 3) cannot be produced by another is a direct consequence of the simplicity and diversity of substances (I, 2 and I, 5) and the Axioms on causality; utterly distinct things are according to Spinoza necessarily causally independent of one another. His proposition does nothing more than make explicit what is already implied.

We have, then, established in I, 2-6 (1) the sim-

plicity of each substance (Def. 3); (2) the diversity of each substance from every other substance (Def. 3); (3) the causal independence of each substance from every other substance (Def. 3). The propositions which establish these three points are I, 2, I, 5 and I, 6. Propositions I, 1, I, 3 and I, 4 do not contribute anything directly to the argument; they are indirectly necessary for the establishment of the other propositions referred to. And they are indirectly necessary only because it is a practice with Spinoza to convert into propositional form what he has already laid down in his Definitions and Axioms. Spinoza could have demonstrated I, 5 by direct reference to Axiom 1 and Definitions 3 and 5 instead of by indirect reference to them through Propositions I, 1 and I, 4; so too he could have demonstrated I, 6 by direct reference to Axioms 3 and 4 instead of by indirect reference to them through Proposition I, 3. Indeed, this is what Spinoza does do in his variorum demonstration of I, 6, although he does it by a *reductio ad absurdum,* which form of argument, however, it was not necessary for Spinoza to use in order to prove the proposition directly. It is, however, more in the style of the geometer to build up a series of propositions, the antecedent ones used for the demonstration of subsequent ones, rather than to have a series of propositions each one of which is immediately demonstrated by reference to the definitions

and axioms. The advantage of this gradual method of procedure is considerable: the demonstrations of the propositions are more reliable because the elements entering into the complex propositions have each been separately demonstrated; hence the possibility of error and confusion is reduced to a minimum. The simpler the intermediate steps, no matter how numerous they may be, the surer and better the demonstration. Spinoza is clearly guided by this consideration.

Once the simplicity of each substance (Def. 3) is established; once Spinoza has demonstrated what the essence of substance (Def. 3) is, he goes on to demonstrate the two most important properties of substance, (Def. 3) namely, (1) necessary existence (I, 7) and (2) infinity (I, 8). That "it pertains to the nature of substance to exist" is demonstrated by means of I, 6 and Definition 1; that "every substance is necessarily infinite" is demonstrated by means of I, 5 and I, 7 and Definition 2. We need not stop over these demonstrations any further since we are concerned primarily with the development of the argument, the formal relationships of the propositions, their general structure and meaning.

Having demonstrated what is the essence of substance and what are its two most important characteristics or properties, Spinoza then introduces two propositions which serve as *transition*

propositions from substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) to Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6).

The term substance, we noted above, has besides its twofold meaning of substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) and Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6), the meaning of entity or thing which consists of more than one attribute—but not necessarily infinite attributes. In the *transition* Propositions I, 9 and I, 10 substance has this intermediate meaning. It *must* have this intermediate meaning because the purpose of these propositions is to prove that substance may have *more than one* attribute as preliminary to the proof (I, 11) that absolutely infinite Substance or God (Def. 6), consisting of infinite attributes, exists.

Spinoza states an absolutely general truth in I, 9, the general relationship of attributes to the reality of the thing constituted by the attributes. Although Spinoza uses the term thing to denote either a substance or a mode, it is clear from the demonstration as well as from the general argument that he is in I, 9 concerned with substance. That "the more reality or being a thing possesses the more attributes belong to it" (I, 9) is demonstrated by referring to Definition 4. Unless substance consisting of more than one attribute is here meant by the term thing, the demonstration would be irrelevant for attribute is defined as constituting the essence of substance and not as constituting the

essence of mode. Since an attribute constitutes the essence of a substance consisting of only one attribute, the essence of a complex substance (entity or thing) is constituted by a number of attributes corresponding to the complexity of the substance. Furthermore, since that which constitutes the essence of substance also constitutes its reality, if A has more attributes than B then A has also a corresponding greater reality than B.

Spinoza is in I, 10 concerned with demonstrating an absolutely general truth about the independence within a complex substance of each of the attributes which constitute that substance; that is, that "each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself." In I, 2 and I, 5 Spinoza has established the simplicity of substance (Def. 3) consisting of only one attribute; in I, 10 he establishes the simplicity of attribute (substance) within a complex substance. The demonstration consists in referring to the Definitions of substance (Def. 3) and attribute: since an attribute constitutes the essence of substance (Def. 4) therefore the attribute must be conceived through itself (Def. 3). We have already discussed what this demonstration implies as to the identity of attribute and substance; we need not therefore refer to this again here.

The scholium to I, 10 is interesting and important. It reads:

> It is apparent that although two attributes may be conceived as really distinct—that is to say, one without the assistance of the other—we cannot nevertheless thence conclude that they constitute two beings or two different substances; for this is the nature of substance that each of its attributes is conceived through itself, since all the attributes which substance possesses were always in it together, nor could one be produced by another; but each expresses the reality or being of substance. It is very far from being absurd, therefore, to ascribe to one substance a number of attributes, since nothing in nature is clearer than that each being must be conceived under some attribute and the more reality or being it has the more attributes it possesses expressing necessity or eternity and infinity.

The language of this scholium is somewhat equivocal, and on the surface confusing and obscure. The scholium would be clear and straightforward if Spinoza used throughout the expression "beings or substances" instead of sometimes using the term "substance" and sometimes the term "being" after his initial statement where both terms are used conjointly. Although at first confusing, this alternating usage serves to bring out even more emphatically than a consistent conjoint usage would, the equivalence of the two terms as here used. The preposition "or" may or may not join equivalents (as it

clearly does not join equivalents in the phrase "may or may not") but an alternating use of two terms for the same purpose, to designate the same thing, is only possible when the two terms are equivalent. Otherwise such usage would inevitably result in either falsehood or nonsense. The reader should recall in this connection Spinoza's alternating usage of the terms God, Substance and Nature. Spinoza could not indicate in a more conclusive way the equivalence of these three terms.

When we get over the possible source of confusion in this scholium just pointed out, Spinoza's meaning and purpose become evident: he is preparing the reader for the next proposition (I, 11), the first proposition in the *Ethics* that is about God or Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6). Having emphasized so strongly up to now the simplicity and independence of the constitutive element in infinite Being, Spinoza is naturally very anxious to have it clearly understood that the constitutive elements do not exist in a separate elemental state in the order of nature, but that in the order of nature "all the attributes which substance possesses were always in it together." Because every substance consisting of only one attribute is an absolutely independent unity, as far as its own nature is concerned, it does not therefore follow that two simple substances, each consisting of only one attribute, must constitute two separate unrelated entities. If this were so

then no complex entity would or could exist. Metaphysically, Spinoza starts with his universe as being an absolutely infinite complex entity; but dialectically, he starts with the constitutive element that can be intellectually discriminated within that entity. But the intellectually discriminated constitutive elements do not exist, metaphysically, as independent, discrete universes. A discrimination made in thought, for purposes of analysis, must not be taken as implying that a separation exists in nature. It is this that Spinoza is trying to drive home in the scholium quoted.

Spinoza has in I, 9 and I, 10 made the transition from substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) to Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6). In I, 11 that "God or Substance consisting of infinite attributes, each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists" the results of I, 9 and I, 10 are tacitly embodied. Since the more reality a thing has the more attributes it has (I, 9) the most real of beings—the *Ens Realissimum*—will consist of infinite attributes; and since each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself (I, 10) each of the infinite attributes of God will express eternal and infinite essence.

The only proof of the existence of Substance (Def. 6) that concerns us here is the first and fundamental proof. And what concerns us in this proof is that part of it depends upon I, 7. (Besides I, 7

Spinoza refers in this proof to Axiom 7.) If Sigwart and his followers are right in maintaining that the first eight propositions have nothing to do with Spinoza's own conception of God, it is surpassing strange that the very existence of the God of Spinoza should be dependent upon the existence of this non-Spinozistic (even anti-Spinozistic) God. And the existence of the God of Spinoza is not alone in being dependent upon propositions which are alleged to have nothing to do with Him: that "substance does not constitute the form of man" (II, 10) is also dependent for its demonstration on I, 7. This would seem to indicate that I, 7 is a vital part of the whole Spinozistic system; for although we may possibly believe that the God of Spinoza may have something to do, at the beginning, with strange gods, it is impossible to believe that man should have anything to do with them. Man, in the *Ethics,* is defined by the nature of the God of Spinoza, not by the nature of any other god.

Furthermore, unless we distinguish between substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) and Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6) Spinoza has, in I, 11 merely repeated I, 7. This is but one of the instances of redundancy which cannot be accounted for on the current interpretations—unless it be considered sufficient explanation to say as does Couchoud that there are in the argument of the First Part of the *Ethics* "des répétitions, des empâte-

ments, des 'trous.' "[1] Besides the redundancy of I, 11 there is, on the current interpretation, an even more striking redundancy in I, 13. In this proposition Spinoza proves that "Substance absolutely infinite is indivisible." This proposition follows hard and fast upon I, 12 where it is demonstrated that "no attribute of substance can be truly conceived from which it follows that substance can be divided." The redundancy of I, 13 is more striking than that of I, 11 because the juxtaposition of the two propositions (I, 12 and I, 13) presumably saying the same thing is so close. On our interpretation, however, Spinoza does not repeat himself at all. In I, 12 he is concerned with substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) considered from point of view of attribute; in I, 13 he is concerned with Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6) as he unambiguously states to be the case. In I, 12, as in I, 7, Spinoza demonstrates a characteristic or property of substance (Def. 3); and what is true of substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) is necessarily true by extension of Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6). The logic of proceeding by means of simple ideas requires that a complex idea be built up out of its simple constituents. And a property which a complex entity has by virtue of the fact that each of its constituent elements has it, that complex entity is demonstrated

[1] P. L. Couchoud, *Benoit de Spinoza*, p. 34.

to have that property by first demonstrating that the constituent element has it. Hence Spinoza first demonstrates that existence (I, 7), infinity (I, 8) and indivisibility (I, 12) are properties of substance consisting of only one attribute (Def. 3) and then he demonstrates, by means of these propositions, that Substance absolutely infinite, consisting of infinite attributes (Def. 6), has these properties (I, 11 and I, 13). If further evidence is needed to prove that Proposition 12 (as well as Propositions 5 and 8) concerns substance consisting of only one attribute (Def. 3) it can be found in Spinoza's scholium to Proposition 15.

It is clear from what has just been said that I, 12 really belongs with I, 7 and I, 8, with the propositions that demonstrate properties of substance infinite only in its own kind (Def. 3). And Spinoza would, I think, undoubtedly have placed I, 12 along with I, 7 and I, 8 if he were not intent upon developing a consecutive argument. Nowhere in the *Ethics* does Spinoza break up the sequential development of the argument merely for the sake of grouping all the propositions of a given sort together. It is this fact that contributes greatly to making the *Ethics* such hard reading. For the demonstration of I, 11, Propositions I, 7, I, 8, I, 9 and I, 10 are indispensable; but I, 12 is quite unnecessary.

The two kinds of substances, for the recognition

of which we have been arguing throughout, are sharply juxtaposed once more in I, 14. This proposition reads: "Besides God, no substance can be nor be conceived." That by "substance" in this proposition Spinoza means substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) and not Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6) is made clear more than once in the course of the demonstration of the proposition. It reads:

> Since God is Being absolutely infinite, of whom no attribute can be denied which expresses the essence of Substance (Def. 6), and since He necessarily exists (I, 11), it follows that if there were *any* substance besides God it would be explained by some *attribute* of God, and thus two substances would exist possessing the same *attribute* which (I, 5) is absurd. (Italics mine.)

If by "substance" in this proposition Spinoza did not mean substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) he would have had to say that "if there were any substance besides God it would have to be explained by *infinite* attributes of God and thus two substances with the same *infinite* attributes would exist, etc." Also Spinoza's reference to I, 5 shows that he was referring to Definition 3 when he spoke of "substance"; when he speaks of God or Substance absolutely infinite he unfailingly refers to Definition 6.

In the opening sentence of the demonstration to

I, 15 the distinction between Substance absolutely infinite (Def. 6) and substance infinite in its own kind (Def. 3) is again evidenced. This sentence reads: "Besides God there is no substance, nor can any be conceived (I, 14), that is to say (Def. 3) nothing which is in itself and is conceived through itself."

The central doctrines which Spinoza establishes concerning the nature of God (in the propositions we have discussed) are (1) that God exists; (2) that God is a unity. We have remarked sufficiently on the demonstration of God's existence; we shall therefore say a few words more about the formal proof of God's unity, summarizing what has already been said.

In I, 5 Spinoza establishes the doctrine that two substances (Def. 3) cannot have the same attribute. It is by means of this proposition that Spinoza demonstrates that "Besides God, no substance can be nor be conceived" (I, 14). For if any substance were to exist outside of God, that substance (Def. 3) would have an attribute which was also an attribute of God (since God consists of infinite attributes) and therefore two substances would exist which have the same attribute, something that is proved impossible in I, 5. Since the same argument can be repeated for the infinite attributes of God, it follows that there is only one God (I, 14, corol. 1).

that is, one Substance consisting of infinite attributes (Def. 6).

In I, 10 Spinoza restates the irrefragable simplicity and identity of every attribute (substance) within a complex substance consisting of more than one attribute. Unless this is established the proof of the existence of a Substance consisting of *infinite* attributes (I, 11) fails to have any real significance. For if attributes are not absolutely distinct one from the other within a complex substance consisting of more than one attribute, the statement that Substance consists of infinite attributes has no more value than the statement that Substance consists of only one attribute. If all attributes within a complex entity have something in common, then that common property most truly expresses its essence. It is for this reason Spinoza takes the very greatest care to establish the simplicity and diversity of each attribute (substance) both when it is the attribute of substance (Def. 3) consisting of only one attribute (I, 2 and I, 5) and when it is an attribute of substance consisting of more than one (I, 10) or of infinite attributes (Def. 6 and I, 11).

The central proposition of the First Part of the *Ethics* is I, 15, that "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can either be or be conceived without God." It is the proposition to which all the preceding propositions lead up, step by step, and the proposition from which all subsequent propositions are

derived. It is, in pictorial language, the apex to which we climb up on one side by means of the first fourteen Propositions and from which we gradually descend by means of the remaining fourteen Propositions because, strictly speaking, the First Part ends with I, 29. (I, 30-36 do not formally belong to the First Part because they are not exclusively concerned with the general characteristics of God which is its legitimate subject-matter; for example, I, 30-32 belong with the Second Part for only there is it first demonstrated that one of the attributes of God is thought.)

If we consider the First Part to end with I, 29 then we have exemplified in the order of the propositions perfect logical symmetry—fourteen Propositions leading up to the culminating Proposition, and fourteen leading away from it. I, 16-20 demonstrate properties of God's essence; I, 21-23 demonstrate properties of the infinite attributes, that is, the nature of their infinite modes; I, 24-25 demonstrate the nature of the things produced by God and their causal relation to Him; and in I, 26-27 the consequences that follow from being so causally related to God; in I, 28 we reach the final step in our gradual declension from God's absolutely infinite nature—we reach the particular finite mode; and in I, 29 the ultimate causal dependence upon God of all things, finite and infinite, is reasserted. In these fourteen Propositions there is a gradual

declension from the absolutely infinite nature of God or Substance to the finite nature of particular modes; which is a beautiful logical counterbalance for the gradual ascension in the first fourteen Propositions from substance infinite in its own kind to Substance absolutely infinite.

II

There can be no doubt that the geometrical order of demonstration is admirably suited for precise statement and exact logical inference. In these respects, it has great advantages over any other form of exposition. But that it has also serious disadvantages, when used as a medium for philosophy, cannot be denied. The geometrical order of demonstration was a major difficulty Spinoza had to contend with in presenting his doctrine on God.

Spinoza's central belief concerning the nature of his absolutely infinite Substance or God is that He is One. It is the unity of Substance (Def. 6) or God that Spinoza wishes above all to make clear and to prove. On it depends his conception of causality and determinism; and on the latter depend, in turn, the essential features of the rest of his philosophy. But what does the geometrical order of demonstration require that Spinoza do in order that he may accomplish his crucial task? It requires him to start, not with the idea of God, but with the idea of a substance that is infinite only in its own kind (Def. 3).

Only by starting with this idea can he prove, *more geometrico,* that absolutely infinite Substance (Def. 6) or God exists and is One. That the necessity of starting with the idea of substance (Def. 3) in order to prove the existence and unity of absolutely infinite God (Def. 6) is inherent in the geometrical order of demonstration and not in the subject matter, we have ample evidence in Spinoza's discussions of the nature of God to be found in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and especially in his letters to Hudde.[1]

This requirement is a decided handicap. But it is fortunately one that Spinoza fully appreciates. Time and again, as we have shown, he takes care to warn the reader not to be misled by the form of the argument into believing that there is more than one Substance (Def. 6) or God.[2] The ultimate purpose of the argument of the first fifteen Propositions—to prove that Substance (Def. 6) or God is One—is insistently before Spinoza's mind; and with the very first Proposition he begins to lay down the foundations of his proof. A polemical refutation of dualism would be to Spinoza—as it should be for every one—a very feeble basis indeed for the unity and singleness of God. Not on the indefinite and unsatisfactory inference that can be

[1] Letters XXXV and XXXVI.

[2] E.g., Proposition 10, scholium; Proposition 14, corollary 1; Proposition 15, scholium of the First Part, and Proposition 7, scholium of the Second Part.

drawn from a refutation, but on the logical necessities of an independent constructive line of thought does Spinoza seek to establish his doctrine on God —at once the ground and the pinnacle of his philosophy.

Spinoza does not, at any time, pretend to know the intimate details of God's unity; he only believes he knows how that unity must *formally* be conceived and proved. In his oft-quoted letter to Oldenburg, Spinoza writes:

> When you ask me what I think about the question which turns on the *Knowledge how each part of Nature accords with the whole of it, and in what way it is connected with the other parts,* I think you mean to ask for the reasons on the strength of which we believe that each part of Nature accords with the whole of it, and is connected with the other parts. For I said in my preceding letter that I do not know how the parts are really interconnected and how each part accords with the whole; for to know this it would be necessary to know the whole of Nature and all its Parts.
>
> I shall therefore try to show the reason which compels me to make this assertion. . . .
>
> By connection of the parts I mean nothing else than that the laws, or nature, of one part adapt themselves to the laws, or nature of another part in such a way as to produce the least possible opposition. With regard to whole and parts, I consider things as parts of

some whole, in so far as their natures are mutually adapted so that they are in accord among themselves as far as possible; but in so far as things differ among themselves, each produces an idea in our mind, which is distinct from the others, and is therefore considered to be a whole, not a part.

After giving his illustration of the parts of the blood and of the little worm living in the blood-stream, he continues with his general argument:

Now, all the bodies of Nature can and should be conceived in the same way as we have here conceived the blood: for all bodies are surrounded by others, and are mutually determined to exist and to act in a definite and determined manner, while there is preserved in all together, that is, in the whole universe, the same proportion of motion and rest. Hence it follows that every body, in so far as it exists modified in a certain way, must be considered to be a part of the whole universe, to be in accord with the whole of it, and to be connected with the other parts. And since the nature of the universe is not limited, like the nature of the blood, but absolutely infinite, its parts are controlled by the nature of this infinite power in infinite ways, and are compelled to suffer infinite changes. But I conceive that with regard to substance each part has a closer union with its whole.[1]

Here, and in many other places, Spinoza uses the expression "whole" and "part" and it is difficult to

[1] Letter XXXII; A. Wolf's translation.

see what other terms he could have employed. Yet to conclude that Spinoza believed the whole is *composed* of the parts, that it is nothing more than their aggregate or sum, would be false. We know from the Axioms and Lemmas after Proposition 13 of the Second Part that Spinoza believed in the existence of finite extended bodies. These bodies—even in their simplest form—differ from one another in respect of motion and rest, quickness and slowness (Lemma II). And hence are, with respect to these qualities, measurable. Extended things are also distinguished from one another in respect of hardness and softness (Axiom III) giving us solids, liquids and gases (Postulate II). Furthermore, the size of bodies can be increased or diminished (Lemma V) making, in another respect, the measurement of bodies possible. Finally, Spinoza proceeds from the consideration of the existence of finitely complex bodies to the consideration of an infinitely complex body—the total physical universe —(Lemma VII, scholium) in such a way that the unwary reader is likely to conclude that Spinoza constructed his conception of extended substance or the attribute of extension, by summation of an infinite number of finite parts. He is likely to conclude, that is, that Spinoza was an atomist.

No conclusion, however, could be further from the truth. Atomism, in any and all forms, is, for Spinoza, an absurd doctrine. He assembles his ar-

ray of arguments against it in his scholium to I, 15. This scholium is of such great importance, it will not be amiss to quote it at some length:

> I have demonstrated, at least in my own opinion, with sufficient clearness (See Corol. Prop. 6 and Schol. 2, Prop. 8) that no substance can be produced or created by another being (*ab alio*). Moreover (Prop. 14) we have shown that besides God no substance can be or be conceived; and hence we have concluded that extended substance is one of the infinite attributes of God. But for the sake of a fuller explanation, I will refute my adversaries' arguments which, taken altogether, come to this. First, that corporeal substance, in so far as it is substance, consists, as they suppose, of parts, and therefore they deny that it can be infinite and consequently that it can pertain to God. . . . A second argument is assumed from the absolute perfection of God. For God, they say, since He is a being absolutely perfect, cannot suffer; but corporeal substance, since it is divisible, can suffer; it follows, therefore, that it does not pertain to God's essence.
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> These are the arguments which I find in authors, by which they endeavor to show that corporeal substance is unworthy of the divine nature, and cannot pertain to it. But any one who will properly attend will discover that I have already answered these arguments, since the sole foundation of them is the supposition that bodily substance consists of parts, a supposition which (Prop. 12 and Corol. Prop. 13) I have

shown to be absurd. Moreover, if any one will rightly consider the matter, he will see that all these absurdities . . . from which these authors attempt to draw the conclusion that extended substance is finite, do not by any means follow from the supposition that quantity is infinite, but from the supposition that infinite quantity is measurable, and that it is made up of finite parts. Therefore, from the absurdities to which this leads nothing can be concluded, excepting that infinite quantity is not measurable, and that it cannot be composed of finite parts. But this is what we have already demonstrated (Prop. 12, etc.) and the shaft, therefore, which is aimed at us turns against those who cast it.

If therefore, from these absurdities any one should attempt to conclude that substance extended must be finite, he would, forsooth, be in the position of the man who supposes a circle to have the properties of a square, and then concludes that it has no center, such that all the lines drawn from it to the circumference are equal. For corporeal substance, which cannot be conceived except as infinite, one and indivisible (Props. 8, 5 and 12), is conceived, by those against whom I argue, to be composed of finite parts, and to be multiplex and divisible, in order that they may prove it finite. Just in the same way others, after they have imagined a line to consist of points, know how to discover many arguments, by which they show that a line cannot be divided *ad infinitum;* and indeed, it is not less absurd to suppose that corporeal substance is composed of bodies or parts than to suppose that a body

is composed of surfaces, surfaces of lines, and that lines, finally, are composed of points. . . .[1]

If, nevertheless, any one should now ask why there is a natural tendency to consider quantity as capable of division, I reply that quantity is conceived by us in two ways: either abstractly or superficially, that is to say, as we imagine it; or else as substance, in which way it is conceived by the intellect alone. If, therefore, we regard quantity (as we do very often and easily) as it exists in the imagination, we find it to be finite, divisible, and composed of parts; but if we regard it as it exists in the intellect, and conceive it in so far as it is substance, which is very difficult, then, as we have already sufficiently demonstrated, we find it to be infinite, one and indivisible. This will be plain enough to all who know how to distinguish between the imagination and the intellect, and more especially if we remember that matter is everywhere the same, and that, except in so far as we regard it as affected in different ways, parts are not distinguished in it, that is to say, they are distinguished with regard to mode, but not with regard to reality. For example, we conceive water as being divided, in so far as it is water, and that its parts are separated from one another; but in so far as it is corporeal substance, we cannot thus conceive it, for as such it is neither separated nor divided. Moreover, water, in so far as it is water, is originated and destroyed; but in so far

[1] We all agree, that is, that a mathematical line can be *bi*sected; but no one would or should conclude, therefrom, that it can also be *di*ssected.

> as it is substance, it is neither originated nor destroyed. By this reasoning I think that I have also answered the second argument, since that too is based upon the assumption that matter, considered as substance, is divisible and composed of parts.

One who reads this scholium attentively will hardly find that Spinoza's Axioms and Lemmas on physics violate his doctrine of the simplicity and indivisibility of extended substance. It is abundantly clear from Spinoza's discussion that extended substance is not, according to him, a composite of finite parts. Being thus fore-warned, the reader is also fore-armed. He knows that no matter what terms and expressions Spinoza is compelled to use—for the lack of better ones—when dealing with the laws of motion and the nature of finite bodies, he in no way intends to deny the simplicity and indivisibility of extended substance, nor even to cast any shadow of contradiction upon them. Whether or not we can clearly and thoroughly understand how this can be done, we can, at any rate, understand what it is that Spinoza maintains and believes.

With regard to the unity of God, the reader is also fore-warned. But the warning the reader is given—"that although two attributes may be conceived as really distinct, we cannot nevertheless thence conclude that they constitute two beings or two different substances" (I, 10, scholium)—has

not been, apparently, sufficient of itself to arm him against the difficulty of firmly holding on to Spinoza's doctrine that God is One in the face of his concurrent doctrine that God consists of infinite attributes, each one of which, in addition to being infinite in its own kind, is also objectively real and causally independent of every other. But again, whether or not we can clearly and thoroughly understand how these two doctrines can be both asserted without contradiction, we should be able, at any rate, to understand that Spinoza does mean to assert them both and that he, at least, finds them in no way contradictory, but mutually compatible. If —as has so frequently been done—we make our own inability to understand their mutual supplementation the basis of our interpretation of Spinoza, we by this procedure add to the natural difficulties of the problem the unnecessary difficulties of our own misrepresentation. We see this unfortunately happening during Spinoza's own lifetime in the case of Tschirnhaus—a critic whose acumen so many interpreters have united to over-praise. Tschirnhaus felt he could legitimately conclude from Spinoza's statement that "nothing in Nature is clearer than that each Being must be conceived under some attribute, and that the more reality or being it has, the more attributes belong to it"—Tschirnhaus felt that from this "it would seem to follow that there exist Beings which have three,

four, or more Attributes, whereas from what has been proved it could be inferred that each Being consists of two attributes only, namely a certain attribute of God and the idea of that attribute." [1] To this implied question Spinoza answered: "As to your additional question, whether for this reason there must be constituted as many worlds as there are attributes, see *Ethics,* scholium to Proposition VII, Part II. This proposition could also be more easily proved by reduction to absurdity. This kind of proof I am accustomed to prefer to the other, when the Proposition is negative, because it is more in accordance with the nature of such propositions. But since you demand only a positive proof, I pass on." [2] In the scholium referred to Spinoza writes: "Before we go any farther, we must here recall to our memory what we have already demonstrated, that everything which can be perceived by the infinite intellect as constituting the essence of substance pertains entirely to the one sole substance only, and consequently that substance thinking and substance extended are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute and now under that." A repetition, obviously, of the warning to be found in the scholium to Proposition 10 of the First Part.

Analogies and parallels are always treacherous.

[1] Letter LXIII. A. Wolf's translation.
[2] Letter LXIV. A. Wolf's translation.

But we may as well resort to analogy and parallel in discussing the unity of God since there is little else that we can do, and the dangers of the subject can hardly be made any worse. The attributes of God, we have throughout contended, have all the characteristics that substances have; attributes and substances, we have claimed, are denotatively equivalent; only connotatively do they differ. Accordingly, therefore, we may substitute the term "substance" (Def. 3) for the term "attribute" wherever the latter occurs. Making this substitution in the definition of God—which we may rightly consider a test-case for all such possible substitutions—it will read: "By God, I understand a Being absolutely infinite, that is to say, Substance consisting of infinite substances, each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence." It has already been shown that attribute and substance (Def. 3) have precisely the same characteristics and function in Spinoza's system when considered by themselves. What remains to be proved is that the unity of God is preserved when we make the substitution our analysis justifies, if not demands. This I shall now do. I shall show that when we read the definition of God in the way just given, we are no more drawn to the inference that God is *not* one, that He is merely the sum of an infinite number of infinite parts, than we are drawn to this inference by the definition of God as originally given by Spinoza.

Although bodies are distinguished from one another in the ways detailed above, it is nevertheless plain to Spinoza that "bodies are not distinguished in respect of substance" (Lemma I). If bodies were distinguished in respect of substance, it would follow that there would be "two or more substances of the same nature or attribute" which is what Spinoza proves to be absurd (I, 5). For every substance is necessarily infinite (I, 8); if substance were finite, it would be limited by another substance of the same nature which would also necessarily exist (I, 7) and the absurdity of having two substances of the same nature or attribute would burden our heads. Bodies, therefore, though they are distinguished from one another in many important ways, are not distinguished from one another in respect of substance. Far from being distinguished from one another, finite bodies are, in respect of substance, all the same. Each one expresses in its own determinate and finite nature, the eternal and infinite essence of the attribute of extension or extended substance (I, 25, corol.).

When, instead of considering finite bodies and their relation to infinite extended substances (Def. 3), Spinoza considers attributes and their relation to absolutely infinite Substance or God (Def. 6) he comes to a parallel conclusion as the result of a similar argument. Attributes are distinguished from one another in the way extension differs from

thought; and the infinite other attributes are analogously different from these both and from each other. But in respect of absolutely infinite Substance (Def. 6) the infinite number of infinite attributes are not distinguished from one another but are the same. Each attribute expresses "one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes; that is to say, in every case the same sequence of things" (II, 7, scholium). Each attribute, that is, expresses the eternal and infinite essence of God's absolutely infinite nature (I, 19, dem.; I, 20, dem.). If each attribute were distinguished from every other in respect of absolutely infinite Substance or God (Def. 6) then Substance or God would perforce have no unity; He would merely be a summary term to denote the infinite collection of infinite attributes. Each attribute would limit every other, in respect of its being an expression of God's essence; and therefore God would be reduced from an absolutely infinite Being to a collection of merely infinite beings. There would be an infinite series of "finitely" infinite gods instead of one absolutely infinite God. Attributes, consequently, are no more to be conceived of as being separated and separable parts of God's nature than bodies are to be conceived of as being separated and separable parts of extended substance. We must, as has already been pointed out, sedulously distinguish between a dialectical separation made in thought for the pur-

poses of analysis and a metaphysical separation which is asserted to exist in fact. The unity of God is not disrupted by his infinite number of infinite attributes. On the contrary, they leave His unity intact, for the infinite attributes, whether they be considered distributively or collectively, express the eternal and infinite essence of God. The relation of attribute infinite in its own kind to Substance absolutely infinite is parallel to the relation of finite modes to their attributes. It does not help much, to be sure, to show that two difficulties which were thought to be distinct are really phases of the one comprehensive difficulty—but even such help need not be despised. In philosophy, as in other activities of life, a little help is better than none.

There are profound difficulties inherent in Spinoza's conception of the unity of God—difficulties celebrated in the Problem of the One and the Many —but it must be admitted that the geometrical order of demonstration, for reasons already given, accentuates them to a serious degree. We may justly lay at the door of the exotic form of philosophic discourse Spinoza was so singularly devoted to, an important measure of the blame for the misunderstanding his metaphysics has suffered from.

The terms "part" and "whole" are certainly unsatisfactory; and when too literally construed are gravely misleading. But we are scarcely any better off when we use "aspects" instead of "parts" to

describe the constitution of the whole—a constitution more easily understood than expressed. When we try to escape this difficulty in the special form in which it is found in Spinoza by wilful and unwarranted exploitation of Spinoza's definition of attribute as "that which the intellect perceives as constituting the nature of substance" we fall into the worst confusion of idealistic error. We have shown in the first chapter that the intellect according to Spinoza must perceive truly; and the quotation from the scholium to I, 15 substantiates, as we can see, our claim. Spinoza there states as emphatically as possible that the intellect and the intellect alone has the power to give us a true conception of the nature of extended substance as it really is in itself and to keep us from falling into the abysmal error of imagining extended substance to be composed of finite extended parts. What applies to extended substance applies equally to thinking substance. And what applies to these two applies necessarily to the absolutely infinite Substance (Def. 6) that is God.

Leibniz, who is perhaps the most faithful disciple Spinoza ever had—one whose "faith unfaithful made him falsely true"—tried to overcome this same difficulty in expression by stating that each monad (Spinoza's attribute or substance reduced to minute scale) mirrors all other monads or the total universe. The image of mirroring is not bad at all; but it still leaves the difficulty in expression

untouched as far as any one is concerned who cannot grasp the meaning of the conception involved and is controlled by a literal analysis of words. For there is a difference between the mirror and what it reflects—a difference that lends itself not only to the interpretation of existing separation, but also of irreducible opposition. Leibniz' further attempt to express the same thing is not more successful. His Pre-established Harmony has wrought strange discord in the ears of philosophers. We can use such expressions as microcosm and macrocosm, constitutive element and organic unity; we can even be lulled into belief that we have an accurate and precise and universally understandable expression in the omni-magical term "organism." It is not to be denied that these terms, and others like them which we possess today, are better than the ones Spinoza had to be content with. But we must not forget that they are better only because they are less unfortunate. When we come to stating the compatibility of qualitative diversity with essential unity—the compatibility of the Many with the One—we reach a point where exact expression is impossible; it must be left to the powers of each individual to grasp the idea that at most can only be adumbrated. In order to state and express we must analyze and distinguish—a fatal necessity when we wish to state and express the unity of the Many in the One. We would do well to confess with Spinoza

that we are in ignorance as to the means whereby the parts are really associated so as to maintain the whole in such a way that no separation between part and whole exists. And when pressed by those who will not admit their ignorance—although their questions spring from nothing else but an exaggerated form of it—we would do well to recognize that the best we can do is to resort, again as did Spinoza, to analogy and illustration.

We have answered, as far as we can, the question as to the nature of the unity of God or Substance (Def. 6) consisting of infinite attributes; but what has our answer to do with what we set out to prove, namely that the unity of God is left just as intact when we take the definition of God to read that He is a Being "consisting of infinite substances"?

We have made it clear—what no one has ever denied—that we are not without a problem on our hands when we speak of God as consisting of infinite attributes; and we have indicated how that problem is to be understood in Spinoza and how it may be solved. To go over some of the ground covered earlier, each attribute expresses the infinite and eternal essence of God—expresses one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes; the modes of each attribute must be conceived through that attribute alone of which they are modes; and therefore when we begin to explain

the order of Nature through one attribute, we must continue to explain the whole of that order or connection of causes through that same attribute alone, since "the modes of any attribute have God for a cause only in so far as He is considered under that attribute of which they are modes, and not in so far as He is considered under any other attribute" (II, 6). Thus, if we start with the modes which are ideas "we must explain the order of the whole of Nature or the connection of causes by the attribute of thought alone" (II, 7, scholium) because "the actual being of ideas recognizes God for its cause in so far only as He is considered as a thinking thing, and not in so far as He is manifested by any other attribute" (II, 5). Likewise, if we start with modes which are extended things "the order of the whole of nature must be explained through the attribute of extension alone. And so with the other attributes" (II, 7, scholium). Because, to put it in universal terms, "each attribute is conceived by itself and without any other" (II, 6, dem.; also I, 10). When we substitute the term "substance" for the term "attribute" in the definition of God, we do not say anything less, but neither do we imply anything more. God's unity is just the same whether we speak of attributes or speak of substances since, like each attribute, each "substance is in itself and is conceived through

itself" (Def. 3) and modes are in substance through which also they must be conceived (Def. 5). The problem of God's unity when He is defined in terms of substances instead of attributes being just the same, so is the solution.